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Richard King, *Religion, Theory, Critique. Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017. 688 p. \$64.99 / £54.00. ISBN 9780231518246. (E-BOOK)

This milestone on classic and contemporary approaches to religion, edited by Richard King and published with Columbia University Press, manages to bring together some of the most relevant scholarly voices within the academic field of religious studies. As the editor acknowledges, this assemblage of scholarly work has been a long time in the making. The idea of such textbook grew from the initiative of Wendy Lochner (Columbia University Press) on publishing a “research-driven textbook on the study of religion” and Richard King’s initiative around the theories of religion that he has organized for the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture at Vanderbilt University, from 2007 to 2009 (xvii).

Written by leading experts in the academic study of religion, the volume explores all dimensions of the subject, offering up-to-date insights and mesmerizing cross-references to other cultural phenomena and theoretical debates. The editor brought together fifty-six chapters enclosed within twelve inter-connected parts. This scholarly de-centered exploration is dedicated to the “academic” study of religion seen as a “discursive field” and a specific language game (xiii). This assemblage of scholarly works displays a multiplicity of approaches and rounds up the “how” of the theoretical presuppositions which have delineated the dominant ways of studying religion within academia. The studies reunited within this assemblage inquire the “how” of the category of “the religious” which has already entered in the classical series of “elisions” as religion/secular/sacred, religion/society/culture (xiv).

The twelve parts are organized thematically. The first part offers ponderings of seminal influences within the field of religious studies (Judaism, Bible, Hegel, Müller, classic comparative theology, Shinto). The second part presents some of the most important naturalistic thinkers (Hume, Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, New Atheists). The third part encompasses some contributions exploring the category of religion in a variety of non-Western environments (indigenous African traditions, *Zongjiao*, Islamic Dīn, translation). The fourth part deals with some psychological approaches to the study of religion (psychology of religion, William James, Rudolf Otto, C.G. Jung, cognitive science, and a critical response). The fifth part conveys the analysis of the category of religion emerging in the Anglo-American debates within the philosophy of religion (religion, structuralist theories of religion, theorizing myth).

The sixth part comprises some contributions at the intersections between religion, society and culture (sociology of religion, social theory, classical anthropological theories of religion, defining religion, media and cultural

studies). The seventh part stresses the classical and contemporary debates of ritual and theories of religious action (classic ritual theories, the myth-ritual debate, from ritual to ritualization, theories of action). The eighth part is dedicated to the historical significance of the history of religions or phenomenological school within the comparative study of religion (phenomenology of religion, Mircea Eliade, critical responses to phenomenological theories of religion, critical religion).

The ninth part surveys the impact points of European continental philosophy on the contemporary theoretical debates within the study of religion (post-Marxism, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, contemporary continental philosophy). The tenth part analyzes the intersections between religion, gender and sexuality (feminist approaches to the study of religion, French feminism, queer theory meets critical religion). The eleventh part is the place where the role of colonialism and race in relation to theories of religion is investigated (coloniality, apartheid comparative religion, theorizing race and religion, black cultural criticism, theorizing black religious studies). The twelfth part offers an examination of contemporary issues and themes in relation to the category of religion (violence, economy, globalization).

The reader can find out why and how this assemblage of scholarly work come to being from the first pages of the volume. First, “to demonstrate that however one characterizes ‘religion,’ it always remains defined in relation to a series of cognate *and* oppositional categories that establish both its clarity and its usefulness as a conceptual placeholder within discourse” and second, “organizing sections according to underlying themes, elisions, and assumptions about ‘the religious’ seeks to avoid an approach that might further entrench disciplinary differences an authority claims (from areas such as psychology of religion, sociology of religion, anthropology of religion, and the like), since the process whereby these disciplinary fields become ‘naturalized’ is itself an object of discussion and debate within this volume” (xiv).

The volume edited by King proves to be a rich repository of fine scholarship dedicated to theoreticians of religion ranging from Hume to Derrida, as well as to bodies of classic and contemporary theories, to themes dedicated to myth, race and religion, and to related disciplines. It can be regarded as a standard reference work for the future. This volume will benefit all categories of students of the academic study of religion and also those of similar disciplines. It provides a useful and invaluable instrument and a milestone of critical research to the reader interested in the academic study of religion.

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